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NEWS RELEASE

LAW STUDENT ABANDONS STREET LIFE TO HELP OTHER EX-CONS TURN THEIR LIVES AROUND; SCOTT WASHINGTON TO GRADUATE MAY 10

DAYTON, Ohio — This is a story about redemption.

It's about how a self-admitted crack addict, drug dealer and convicted felon turned away from the allure of Los Angeles streets to the promise of the classroom. On Saturday, May 10, Anthony ("Scott") Washington will receive a University of Dayton law degree at a 10 a.m. commencement ceremony at UD Arena.

Washington, a law clerk in Montgomery County Common Pleas Court Judge A.J. Wagner's office, will petition to take the Ohio bar exam this summer. He's already lined up a job in the Montgomery County public defender's office. He's finished law school without his classmates knowing about the street gangster lifestyle he abandoned 13 years ago. He saves his story for his work with ex-cons, drug addicts and alcoholics.

"I look back and can't figure out how I'm still alive," said Washington, a 38-year-old father of four who's been married a decade. "Almost all of my childhood friends are addicted, career criminals and/or locked up. One of my closest friends is on death row in Oklahoma. I hope to one day be able to work on Kevin's case and get his sentence commuted."

By 1990, Washington said he had been arrested 14 times for a variety of misdemeanors and felonies, had served almost a year in Los Angeles County jail, couldn't kick cocaine despite two drug rehabilitation stints and could barely read and write. He was also the father of a 5-week-old boy.

"I was at the bottom of the bottom in 1990. I was totally into the streets," he said. "We

were not into doing drive-by shootings and killing people. Our hustle was robbing dope dealers and pimps. We were mostly into getting high, getting women, getting money. Ultimately, if you're familiar with the expression, I ended up 'to the curb.' If you saw somebody out at 4 or 5 in the morning with no place to go, that was me."

As he cradled his infant son on April 15, 1990, Washington vowed to turn his life around. "Because of the immeasurable love I had for my baby boy, I no longer wanted to be any part of the streets," he said. "It was the most difficult thing to go back and start from scratch."

He checked into groups for recovering addicts and asked his family for help. His father, a veterinarian who directed the division of lab animal medicine at UCLA, helped him land a job cleaning animal cages. He enrolled at Los Angeles Pierce College, where it took him five years to acquire an associate's degree in liberal arts.

"I couldn't even write a decent sentence," he said. "I needed to do three years of remedial work even to get to college level." In 1997, he transferred to California State University Northridge where he graduated with honors with a bachelor's degree in urban studies and planning. He maintained a 3.91 GPA while working 56 hours a week.

Washington chose to attend the University of Dayton School of Law because of its Academic Excellence Program, a mentoring/tutoring program created by law professor Vernellia Randall that helps non-traditional law students succeed. Washington is now a graduate student director in the program and tutors first-year students, mostly African-Americans, in legal writing.

Randall calls Washington "one of the most intellectually gifted people who has ever come through the law school. What's really amazing is that no matter what he does, he has not lost touch with where he's come from. He is able to say to drug-addicted convicted felons, 'You don't have to stay there.' He clearly is a person who's going to find a way to succeed."

He's also someone committed to giving back. As a volunteer for the Combined Health District's Center for Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Services, he shares his story with

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alcoholics and addicts seeking recovery. With the help of Judge A.J. Wagner, Washington created a probationer mentoring program. He's also a member of the Ex-Offender Discernment Team (a division of Workplace Reconnections), which helps ex-convicts develop skills to enter the workforce.

"I mentor convicted felons and tell them my story. I try to convey the message, 'It's not over,'" Washington said. "The message is really quite simple, and I express it in very simple terms. Stay close to people who love you, do not abuse illegal substances, do not commit any crimes, find employment — any employment — and most importantly, enroll in school and stay there.

"You can sit in a classroom," he said, "or you can go to prison. I tell them that the classroom is a much better place and talk about the availability of financial aid. I tell them I owe student loans, but look at my earning potential."

Wagner and Glen Dewar, director of the Montgomery County public defender's office, say this aspiring attorney can have a huge impact in the legal profession because of the language he speaks.

"He exemplifies so well what we want to do as public defenders with our clients," said Dewar, who hired Washington on the spot during an interview. "So many people get caught up in the environment that he left."

Added Wagner: "He can say better than anyone, 'Here's where you're at. I've been there. Here's where you can be. I've been here, too.' A big part of my job is trying to motivate people to turn their lives around. He can speak the motivational speech first hand. ...He recognizes the power his story can have if it can turn someone around."

Washington said he wants to use his law degree to affect change. "I want to have some impact on the criminal justice system. It's not getting any better for African-Americans. We're 13 percent of the population, but we comprise more than 50 percent of the prison population. My story isn't as important as reducing those numbers."